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RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0522  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NIAMEY 000625

SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - SIPDIS CAPTION ADDED

SIPDIS

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TAGS: MOPS PGOV PREL CASC EMIN NG

SUBJECT: NIGER: A PESSIMISTIC ASSESSMENT OF GON-TUAREG RELATIONS, FROM THE MAN IN THE MIDDLE

REF: (A) NIAMEY 616 (B) NIAMEY 607

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Classified By: Ambassador Bernadette M. Allen, reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Mohamed Anacko, the man responsible for implementing the 1995 agreement ending the Tuareg rebellion, fears that President Tandja's desire for a military solution to the recent Tuareg uprising risks turning it into a full fledged rebellion that could affect the entire region. He condemned recent Tuareg attacks in northern Niger, but said the Tuaregs have valid grievance and the GON should negotiate with them rather than dismiss them as bandits and drug traffickers. He placed little faith in Khaddafi's mediation efforts, and thought the Algerians could do better. End Summary.

¶2. (C) High Commissioner for Peace Restoration Mohamed Anacko was the leader of one of the Tuareg rebel groups that eventually reached a peace agreement with the GON in 1995. His current job consists of trying to ensure that the peace agreement holds. With the recent attacks on GON security forces by Tuareg dissidents, he is caught between a government that wants to brand the dissidents as bandits and drug traffickers, and his former colleagues who demand political, economic, security and social concessions from Niamey. He offered a pessimistic assessment of the situation in a May 2 meeting with the Ambassador and DCM.

¶3. (C) Ambassador Allen began the meeting by expressing her concern about recent security events, which she said had prompted the Embassy to warn American citizens against traveling north of Agadez. She asked if the government was negotiating with the Tuareg dissidents to try to resolve the situation.

¶4. (C) Anacko condemned the dissident Tuareg group's attacks, but rejected labeling the group as bandits. He dismissed Tandja's recent effort to paint the dissident group as drug smugglers (ref A) by saying that drug smugglers may have used the Tuaregs, but if the GON is serious about fighting drugs, it should go to the source. He said that he has urged President Tandja to negotiate with the dissident Tuaregs.

¶5. (C) Anacko feared that Tandja seeks a military solution. The Nigerien military is weak now, but the government is negotiating with China for aircraft and arms. Those could

arrive as early as June, and might prompt the government to launch an offensive. Any aerial bombing of Tuaregs would result in considerable civilian casualties, and possibly even a "genocide," according to Anacko.

¶6. (C) Anacko said that he has talked to Tandja by phone, most recently on April 27, but the President has refused to meet with him in person. Tandja asked Anacko to go to the north to resolve the issue, but Anacko said that was impossible because of the security situation. Similarly, the dissidents would not feel safe traveling to Niamey or Agadez.

A group of the Tuareg dissidents recently met in Libya with Kahaddaf, who will soon send emissaries to Niamey to relay the Tuareg concerns. Anacko had little faith in Khaddaf's mediation, however. He said that Algeria would be better positioned to deal with the matter. It is run by a real government rather than one man, and is therefore better positioned to follow through on agreements.

¶7. (C) In response to the Ambassador's question about how the recent spike in uranium prices might contribute to the conflict, Anacko complained that fewer than 5 percent of the mining companies' Nigerien employees are Tuareg. The mining companies even hire drivers from the south, and Chinese companies bring in Chinese laborers, whom Anacko believes are prisoners. France is displeased with Niger because it previously had a monopoly on uranium and other mining, but French companies only won four of 19 new mining concessions. Canada and China won many of the new concessions. The new mining law provides that 15% of mineral revenues go to the communities where the mines are, but Anacko said that is not enough.

¶8. (C) Anacko said he knows all the dissident leaders well, and talks to them every day. The other ex-combatants with whom Anacko works in Niamey are becoming frustrated with the government's approach to the issue. Anacko referred favorably to the recent agreement between Tuaregs and the Malian government that gave the Tuareg's responsibility for security in northern Mali.

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¶9. (C) Anacko warned that the dissidents are currently few in number, but if the GON doesn't address their grievances they could become a popular movement resulting in a full fledged rebellion which could spread beyond Niger. Anacko said that ethnic Toubous in the east had supplied the land mines used by the Tuaregs in the north (ref b). He noted a recent incident involving Mohamid Arabs in Diffa (southeastern Niger), and said they may join forces with the Tuaregs. They, in turn, are reportedly related to the Jinjaweed militia in Darfur. Former supporters of President Barre are reportedly involved. AQIM may be in touch with the Tuaregs. Anacko stressed that these groups do not have any common ideology or objective, but they may find it advantageous to cooperate with each other.

¶10. (C) Anacko agreed with the Embassy's warden message; the north is not a safe place now.

ALLEN